

WHY TWENTY-FOUR PANTHERS ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS IN LOUISIANA



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Early dawn raid in Sept. 1970 on New Orleans Panther Office

In May of 1970, the Louisiana State Chapter of the Black Panther Party was established in New Orleans. (It was then called the National Committee to Combat Fascism.) After functioning at 2352 Saint Thomas Street for a short period, serving the People with survival programs, such as a liberation school for the youth and a free lunch program, and also holding community political education classes in order to make the people aware of what the Party was all about, an unexplained eviction notice was issued to the Party. This notice was issued by a racist judge who owned the house and a bootlicker handling its realty who both conspired, along with other reactionary forces, to destroy the Party, before it could begin.

When the local news media received word of the eviction of the Panthers, they quickly created a questionnaire to circulate through New Orleans, asking the "provocative question" as to whether there would be a confrontation between the Party and the New Orleans Pig Department. The Party, having already decided to move, for the simple reason that the house was too small, took the matter to court, while trying to find a new house. The reactionary press had already previously published the raving statements of racist Louisiana Governor McKeithen to the effect that Louisiana and New Orleans would not tolerate the existence of the Black Panther Party in their city and state: "We will not let the Panthers get off the ground in this city."

Although hundreds of threats of this same nature were received from racist vigilante groups, specifically the Ku Klux Klan, and from various enforcement agencies throughout the State, in July of 1970, another house was rented by the Party on Piety Street. This house was located across from the infamously over-crowded and indecent Desire Housing Project, population estimated at over twenty thousand people, all of whom are Black. The very first day this headquarters opened, while it was being cleaned in preparation for its opening, the New Orleans Pig Intelligence Division drove around the area constantly, filming all sides of the house. And, after only three weeks in the Piety Street office, another eviction notice was received, this one coming from the owner of the house, a man

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named Broussaud.

He had been coerced by pigs to evict the Panthers. Broussaud owned a near-by grocery store, also on Piety Street, and the people in the community were therefore familiar with his ways. For example, although he is a Black man, Broussaud at one time used a natural disaster, a hurricane, to raise the prices of items in his store, when practically all stores in the area had been forced to close. This was particularly difficult on the poor people of the Desire Projects. With this in mind, and since two months rent had been paid in advance, and because the people in the Desire community wanted the Party to stay, the decision was made to remain right there.

Then, on September 14th (1970), a week before the eviction notice stated was the final date of occupancy, there was a community political class in which it was exposed to the people there that two Black men working for the police department had attempted to infiltrate the community. The people being very angered at having discovered this devious plot to destroy the community dealt with them immediately in the streets. Somehow, still unexplained, these pigs managed to escape the community with wounds that the people had inflicted upon them. The next morning Pig Chief Giarusso of New Orleans along with fascist Mayor Moon Landrieu, in disbelief of the People's intelligence to discover their agents in the Black community and wishing to carry out their long-standing threat, announced over the news media that they would raid Panther Headquarters that morning. They stated that all persons residing in the Piety Street area would have to be evacuated.

As their "legal" excuse for this blatant action, the fascists alleged to have arrest warrants for six people in the office, who were supposed to have shot into a pig car the night of September 14th, wounding a pig named Raymond Reed. No warrant was presented. Instead, the pigs fired into the office for approximately 30 minutes, using such war machinery as machineguns of various sorts, armored vehicles and helicopters. Some twenty or more people from the community were shot and wounded that morning. And, thirteen people from the Black Panther Party were arrested: Charles Scott, Tyrone Edwards, Alton Edwards, Donald Gyton, William Cloud, Isaac Edwards, Milton Martin, Ronald Ailsworth, Leroy Jones, Elaine Young, Leah Hodges and Cathy Bourns. A fourteenth person was a brother not a member of the Party, but who could not even get out of the house because of the heavy gun fire. His name is Jerry Tylor. All were charged with attempted murder; some, with criminal anarchy; others, with aggravated battery and federal gun violation. Their ransom was set at \$100,000 each. Later, more people were arrested on warrants stemming from the accusations of the two black pig infiltrators, Melvin Howard and Israel Fields. Among those arrested shortly after this raid were Ernest Touro, Clarence Jones and Alfred McCoy (who was just sentenced to 5 years at Louisiana's Angola State Penitentiary for aggravated battery upon these two black pigs.).

Soon after this attack, on September 16th, New Orleans pigs murdered Kenneth Borden, directly in front of Broussaud's grocery store. According to the pigs, a crowd of people had gathered allegedly to fire-bomb Broussaud's store. There was gun fire out of Broussaud's store and also from the guns of pigs who arrived on the scene, shooting indiscriminately at everything in sight. As a result, Kenneth Borden was murdered. The very next day after the raid on the office, the remaining members of the Party, along with the people in the community moved into the other side of the building on Piety Street, to re-open the office. And, three weeks later, the Party office was moved into the Desire Housing Project, and the Party began to again function as usual. The bail of the fourteen brothers and sisters arrested was lowered. However, when people in the community tried to pay bail for one of these political prisoners, by paying 10% of the total ransom to a bail bondsman, it was discovered that no bonding company in the whole State would accept the money. This still did not stay the hard work of the community and the Party to fight for the rights and freedom of the People.

The pigs became therefore even more worried, especially since the office was now located inside the Desire Projects, surrounded by Black people who had become very aware of how repressive and fascist the New Orleans Police Department was, and who had stepped up their desire to resist.

Still trying to get rid of the Party, once again the pigs had another eviction notice sent, charging the occupants of Desire Project House #3315, the Black Panther Party office, were violating a criminal trespassing law and had to leave. The members of the Party passed out a petition in the community and the people willingly signed it. The petition asked for the consent of the people who live in the community for the Party to stay in the Desire Projects. And, the permission was granted by the people. A contradiction arose, because the Housing Authority in New Orleans said that the Party would have to leave because, they claimed, no rent had been paid; but, in fact, these pigs had refused the money. So again a confrontation between the Party and the reactionary New Orleans forces was anticipated on any day. And, on the morning of November 19th, approximately 600 pigs, in armored vehicles (new ones having been recently bought by the New Orleans Pig Department), moved in to assault the office in the projects.

Three to five thousand Black people, men and women old and young, stood between the pigs and the office demanding that the fascists leave their community immediately. The fascists frustrated themselves trying to get the people to leave, but the people continued demanding they withdraw from the community. Finally, after four hours, they retreated. It was the only thing they could do in the face of the power of the People. And the People sang and danced in the streets. The trespassing case was taken to the Federal Courts to await a decision by a judge.

Later on that month (November, 1970), George Russell and Harold Holmes, members of the Party, along with 25 other people from the community, left to go to the People's Revolutionary Constitutional Convention in Washington, D.C. Before having hardly left, they were arrested by heavily armed members of the New Orleans Pig Department. Harold Holmes was charged with criminal anarchy and criminal trespassing; George Russell was charged with criminal trespassing, criminal anarchy and criminal property damage. And, on the morning of November 26th, at 1:30 a.m., members of the New Orleans Pig Department, numbering approximately 50, donned the uniforms of priests and U.S. Postal workers, thereby gaining entrance to the doors of the Desire Project address which was the office of the Louisiana State Chapter of the Black Panther Party. They shot one member of the Party, Betty Powell, in the chest, and arrested a total of six people. The six arrested were: Godthea Cooper, Leon Lewis, Marshall Kellen, Odell Brown, Larry Jackson, and Betty Powell. All were charged with attempted murder and violation of the federal fire arms act. These brothers and sisters are presently incarcerated in the Orleans Parish Prison, awaiting trial.

The conspiracy plot by New Orleans Ku Klux Klan Mayor Landrieu and Police Chief Giarusso and the whole Mafioso State of Louisiana is not completed. It is presently only moving from the streets to the fascist Louisiana judicial system: The trial of those first fourteen members arrested is scheduled to begin on June 21, 1971.

We call upon all justice and freedom loving people throughout the world to show their support for these brothers and sisters, for all twenty-four of these New Orleans political prisoners, for all political prisoners.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE